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The Black Cat

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The Strange Case of Southpaw Skaggs.*

BY ARTHUR CHAPMAN.

HEN a star baseball pitcher snaps a tendon in his salary wing he feels about as cheerful as a concert fiddler who has had his left hand massaged in the jaws of his pet bulldog, or a painter of sunsets who has gone color blind in Naples. That was what happened to me when I was travelin' my strongest in big league company. There was a strike called in my left shoulder, and all the rest of my arm went out in sympathy. I couldn't throw a ball with speed enough to bu'st through a piece of tissue paper — me, who had been celebrated for years for havin' more steam than a Mogul ingine! I was pulled out of the game, when it was seen that I couldn't do more than float the ball into the catcher's mitt as soft as snowflakes fallin' on a feather bed. My manager's face was longer 'n a Sunday School superintendent's on a stormy day when I told him my famous left wing, that had held thousands spellbound, was deader 'n Casey's cork leg.

"I'll have to give you your two weeks' notice, Bill," he said, finally. "Any high school team in the country 'd have our outfielders climbin' the fences all the afternoon on the Wellesley College twirlin' you did to-day. I'm sorry to see you go, 'cause it

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costs me the championship sure. I've got a brother who hustles a truck down to the Union Depot, and maybe he can git you a job as crossin' tender."

I took off my uniform and put on my street clothes and went out into the unfeelin' world to think things over. The fans had begun to forget me already, and was talkin' about the wonderful work of a young recruit who had saved the game after I was took out. I gritted my teeth and walked along and said nothin', with my left arm swingin' like so much dead wood.

About a block from the ball park, a young feller named Doc Bings comes up and puts his hand on my shoulder. It sure brought the tears to my eyes, bein' the first mark of sympathy I had had, and, after I had blinked awhile, I says:

"Play that Shopang thing, Doc, 'cause I'm headed fer the boneyard. What show is there for a pitcher with a bu'sted tendon in his workin' wing?"

Doc looked serious for a minute, and then he asked me to come up to his office, where he spent most of his hours waitin' for patients that never showed up. I had knowed Doc in his medical student days, when he had played first base for his college team, which same I coached. He was a likable young feller, and always made it his practice to have a seat on the bleachers when I was workin', and many a game I have won, simply through the inspiration of his college yell. He looks my arm over, and then he says:

"Accordin' to all dope, you are a dead one, Bill. That south paw, with which you have dazzled the crowned heads of baseball, is now all to the past tense."

"Ain't there no show at all for me, Doc?" I asked.

"Not unless some young Rube with a whip he don't need is willin' to donate you the mainspring out of his speed machine," he says.

"In case I get some young feller who is willin' to part with a good tendon, would such an operation be possible?" says I, graspin' at a straw.

"It might be possible," says Doc, "but where are you goin' to find an altruistic brother who will be willin' to part with good

whipcord in exchange for the frayed and battered muscle you 'd offer in trade?"

"Hold on," I broke in. "I've got an idea, Doc, and if you and me can do a little team work maybe we can head old man Fate off at the home plate and win this here game after all. We won't need to deprive no aspirin' youngster of his sidewheel in order to put Southpaw Skaggs back into the game. I want you to splice an ostrich tendon on to this left wing of mine."

"An ostrich tendon," says Doc, so surprised his pipe fell.

"Sure," I says. "I happen to know that the ostrich has got the strongest leg muscles of any representative of the animal kingdom. When I was pitchin' in the Texas league, I worked winters helpin' on a ostrich ranch not far from El Paso. There's nothin' I don't know about them critters. Many 's the time I've woke up, after one of 'em has kicked me insensible, and wished I could deliver a punch like that. When an ostrich draws up his foot and lets go, you have speed exemplified. The kick of a mule ain't in it, any more than a freight local is in it with a lightnin' express."

"I begin to see possibilities," says Doc. "Southpaw Skaggs, I hereby apologize for harborin' the suspicion, all these years, that you couldn't possibly get room for a real thought in your cranium, outside of baseball."

"Don't apologize," I says. "You just get to the grindstone and sharpen your operatin' instruments, and, when I bring an ostrich here, you be ready to remove the longest and strongest tendon in that bird's leg and hitch it to this here parted cable of mine."

And, on securin' Doc's promise, out I starts into the world to find a bargain in muscular ostriches.

I had a long and hard search before I found what I wanted, and my early trainin' in the bush leagues, where we used to ride from town to town on the freight trains when the manager didn't have the price of transportation, stood me in good stead. I rode the bumpers pretty near all through Southwestern Texas, across New Mexico, and through a good share of Arizona before I found an ostrich proprietor who was willin' to sell anythin' but plumes.

Finally, near Phoenix, I found a man who was so mad at a big, rangy ostrich that he was almost willin' to give the bird away. I don't blame the man any, as the bird had kicked him somethin' shameful, and all the beefsteaks at the Chicago packin' houses wouldn't make much impression on the black eye he was carryin'. Bob Fitzsimmons, the bird's name was, and the man didn't act none too friendly toward the ostrich when he was discussin' the sale with me.

"If it's a leg muscle you're after, that bird's got the greatest in the world," he says. "He can reach over an eight-foot barb-wire fence and land on your solar plexus jest as easy as a baby 'd reach up and yank its mother's apron strings. You can take that bird and remove the tendons from both legs if you want to, and then I'll jest tie him to a stake in front of my house and gloat over him when he finds he can't land anythin' but love taps where he used to deliver knockout punches."

"All right," I says, "but I am confident that the bird ain't goin' to be hurt any, except havin' his speed limit cut down from ninety-nine miles an hour to about ten, which will save him lots of fines in the police court. Breakin' or removin' tendons ain't a serious matter to anybody but baseball pitchers like me."

The upshot of the deal was that, in consideration of one hundred dollars cash, the ostrich was loaned to me by the party of the first part, which was the ostrich man, on condition that all railroad charges to and from the ranch be paid by the party of the second part, which was me. Furthermore, in case of the doctor performin' the common trick of sewin' any operatin' instruments in the bird's leg, and the bird dyin' therefrom, the party of the second part was to pay the full cash value of the animal, accordin' to ostrich quotations on the day of said bird's demise.

Doc was in his glory when the ostrich and me showed up at his office, ready for operatin' purposes. He had got a hull medical college interested in the experiment and there was an army of amachoor sawbones and nurses ready to transplant a tendon from that Sahara wanderer to the disabled wing of Southpaw Skaggs. In fact, they was so eager that I was afraid they wouldn't stop at one tendon, but would rob the bird of all the

muscle he had and make me a reg'lar ostrich Sandow.

They had some trouble with the ostrich, and three of Doc's assistants was laid low with kicks before the bird was finally strapped down and chloroformed. It should have been funny to me, on the next operatin' table, but the sight of all the cold steel layin' around in full view had robbed me of the power to laugh. Next minute I was losin' consciousness, and, when I come to, my glass arm was tied in a long bandage, and Doc Bings was feelin' my pulse.

"Purty work, Skaggsy, old man," says Doc. "You've got the game cinched now, if you just keep quiet awhile. The operation was a great success. You've got an ostrich tendon as thick as my middle finger spliced on to that busted sinew in your pitchin' arm, and in six months you ought to be able to throw a baseball through a two-inch pine plank from the pitcher's slab."

"How about the ostrich?" I says, sorter weak, for my arm was stingin' as if an inshoot had caught me at the plate.

"Oh, he'll be all right in a few weeks, except for a limp in one leg. He can't kick hard enough to break a pane of glass, but outside of that, there's nothin' the matter with him."

I leaned back, contented, on finding that I would not have to pay any damages to the ostrich man, and then began a long and dreary period of waitin'. In a few weeks I had my arm out of bandages, and then, when the first days of spring come, and the kids begun infestin' the corner lots, I got out and rolled the horsehide pill to some of the little shavers. At first I didn't try to do nothin' but toss the ball. Doc was watchin' me like a hawk, and if I tried to throw overhand, he'd walk up and roast me.

"Cut it out, you brainless Sahara sand-trotter," he 'd say. "Remember you ain't a common ball player any more, but are an investment. There's a lot of money tied up in you, and we can't afford to have you ruin that new wing by tryin' to steam up too soon. Toss 'em for a week or two, and then you can begin lobbin' 'em — and after that I'll tell you when to throw in the fireworks."

I follered Doc's instructions to the letter, and didn't begin

throwin' any speedy balls until my arm felt as good as new. In fact it felt better than new, and I had hard work to keep from pickin' up cobblestones or chunks of iron and heavin' 'em at things for the pure joy of throwin'. But every day I loosened up a little more, under Doc's directions. He would put on the catcher's mitt and coach me in control, for I found that I was inclined to be a little wild on account of the new strength that had developed in my left arm. The balls 'd plunk harder and harder in Doc's mitt, and finally I seen him wince, and hop around on one foot and blow on his fingers. Next day he had a semi-professional catcher hired to take his place at the receivin' end, but inside of a week that feller had retired with bunged-up hands.

Doc got a stockier catcher, who could manage to smother my twisters, but I seen it was goin' to be hard to find anybody to hold me when I got to pitchin' right. I could make the ball whizz over the plate like a streak. The eye could hardly foller it, and what was more, I had all my old control. I could shoot a fast one acrost the inside corner of the plate, and then, with almost the same pitchin' motion, I could lob a slow floater acrost the outside corner. The curves 'd all break at least a foot nearer the plate than any of my old curves 'd do, showing what tremendous speed that ostrich tendon was givin' my arm, and Doc 'd just howl with delight when a sizzler plunked into the catcher's mitt.

"I can see 'em smoke!" he'd yell. "Rusie and Walter Johnson rolled into one wouldn't have enough margin on you to draw two bits more at the turnstile. You're the biggest prize in the national grab-bag. You're the only superphenom the game of baseball has ever known, and all we've got to do now is to find the right kind of a berth for you."

As I was a free agent, and was at liberty to sign anywhere I pleased, it was decided that the best scheme was to get the big league clubs biddin' for my services, and Doc was to have two thousand out of my purchase money. I figgered that the best dope was to pitch against some big league club in a practice game before the season opened. In the meantime, Doc, who knowed several sportin' editors, had some of the big papers

print items about the rumored return to form of the once-celebrated Southpaw Skaggs. The sportin' editors didn't half believe the statement, but printed it out of friendliness to Doc. The news wasn't long in travelin', and when the big league champeens struck our town, on their way home from trainin' in the South, I found the manager chuck full of curiosity when I called on him.

"What's this I hear about you comin' to life, Skaggs?" he says. "Next thing they'll be saying that the mummy of Rameses the Second has crawled out of its grave clothes and is goin' to play ball."

"Laugh if you want to," I says, "but when I git through pitchin' against you to-morrow you'll be chasin' me around with a fountain pen and a blank contract and weepin' scaldin' tears because I won't sign under ten thousand a year. I'm goin' against you with the rawest lot of amachoors behind me that ever crawled into uniforms. Half of 'em don't know which end of the bat to hold when they step to the plate. But we picked the poor ones because I'm goin' to play the hull game against you alone — just me and that big-fisted Backstop Kelly. I know he's a joke throwin' to bases, but you needn't figger on a base-stealin' percession, because there ain't goin' to be enough of your men reach first to muss up the bag none."

I could see that the manager was dyin' with curiosity, and he watched me like a hawk when I tossed a few in practice jest before the game was called next day. But I didn't put on any steam, and he couldn't tell a thing before the game begun.

The visitors, bein' fresh from the southern trainin', was brown as berries and hard as nails. They had the speerit that makes a champeen team, though they was a little shy of pitchers for a long, grindin' season, and it done my heart good to see 'em scamper around the diamond and outer gardens in practice. There's somethin' about the workin' of a real baseball machine that certainly gits to the core of any man who knows and loves the national game. As for the team behind me, I didn't lie when I described it to the manager of the big leaguers. I think it was about the rawest collection of sand-lotters I ever

saw in my life, and the big leaguers nearly fell off their bench laughin' at the way the ball was booted and juggled when it come our turn to practice.

But with the first ball I shot over the plate when the game had been called, I could see the jaws of them confident professionals drop. I follered it with a swift out curve that didn't break three feet from the batter's shoulder. He thought he was goin' to be hit and dropped into the dust, but the ball just cut the inside corner of the plate and the second strike was bawled. Then I worked a change of pace, and the ball floated over the exact center of the plate, big as a house, but the batter had struck at it more 'n half a second before it arrived.

I heard Doc's familiar, encouragin' whoop after I had fanned out the third man.

"Go it, Sahara!" he yelled, when the visitors had trotted out on to the field, the most puzzled-lookin' lot of athletes you ever saw. "Show 'em what a real pitcher is like!"

Well, the feats that I performed in the box that day I hate to talk about, bein' a modest man by nature. That ostrich arm of mine was workin' to perfection. I shot the cannon-balls over the pan till my catcher come out and pleaded for mercy on account of his hands. Then I made him play back to the grand stand until the third strike, when he come up and generally grabbed a floater from under some over-anxious player's bat. The champeen swatters of the big league was toys in my hands. Men with an average of over three hundred against the gilt-edged pitchin' of the world, made passes as feeble as babes, and I could hear the manager oratin' to 'em on the bench in a way that 'd make Patrick Henry seem like a deaf mute.

"What's the matter with you high-priced show girls?" he'd yell, after the usual trio of strikeouts. "You hit like the oldest resident of the Soldiers' Home killin' flies with a folded newspaper. Don't you know that this feller who 's servin' the pill was only a second-rater when Methusalem was a kid? He uster be deck hand on Noah's ark, but here you fellers let him come along and go through you like a yegg-man in the mint. I'll bush-league the hull bunch of you if there ain't some runs next innin'."

But threats and tears wasn't any use. I had the Geronimo sign on every batter. In fact, no human bein' could do anythin' with what I was servin'. Once the captain of the visitors, in the sixth innin', managed to hit the ball and it rolled feebly at my feet. I picked it up and then stood with it in my hand and let the captain run to first. Then he stole second and third, but I fanned the next three men, while the captain died in awful agony on the third sack.

But, as a matter of fact, we wasn't doin' much better in the way of runs. The batters we had couldn't hit the other pitcher out of the diamond, and the score was nothin' to nothin' at the end of the eighth. Up to the final session my arm was workin' smoother and better than ever, but I was fightin' off a peculiar sensation that I had felt several times before but had paid no attention to it. I felt awful hungry — a kind of hunger that I had never felt so strong in my life. I had never chewed tobacco, but when I saw a player take a bite off a plug I grabbed it out of his hand and swallowed the hull thing. The look of astonishment on his face was something never to be forgotten, but I calmly walked over to the water jar, and, after taking a few little nippy, chicken-like swallows, I broke the handle off the tin cup and swallowed that. When I stepped on to the mound to open the ninth inning, I realized what was the matter with me.

The transplantin' of that bird's tendon to my arm was turnin' me into an ostrich.

When a full realization of my predicament came over me I broke into a cold sweat. I hit the first man up and he dropped into the dust with a howl of pain. The ball had caromed off his ribs, and he was able to go to first in a few minutes, but if it had hit him a square blow he would have gone to the hospital. The next batter got four wide ones, and the coachers for the visitors was out on the lines, thinkin' they had me rattled. I was rattled all right, but they didn't do it. It was the work of a dad-busted ostrich from the hot sands of Arizona. The appetite for somethin' bright and shiny and hard was growin' stronger within me, and, when the umpire dropped the little nickel-plated indicator he carried in his hand, I grabbed it up

and swallowed it. He staggered back, white as a sheet, but I turned and pitched the ball over the plate and he had to keep at his work.

I give three more bases on balls before I managed to pull myself together and fan out the side, but two runs had been forced over the plate. We opened the second half of the ninth with the score two to nothin' against us. Two men fanned, and then Kelly, the catcher, who batted just ahead of me and who was a good natural hitter, lined out a pretty single that a faster man could have stretched into two bases. Steppin' to the plate, I fidgeted around while the other pitcher jockeyed awhile with Kelly, tryin' to catch him off first. Slyly I raked up a little pile of gravel with one foot and then picked it up and swallowed it. No food ever tasted better to me in my life than that handful of gravel, and, under its inspiration, I reached out after a high, wide one and drove it to the far corner of the field. The hit was good for a home run with trimmin's, and as I tore past first, I heard Doc whoop.

I turned second, and, just before reachin' third, saw that the left-fielder had got the ball and was relayin' it back to the diamond.

"Go on," fog-horned Doc, above everybody else. "You've got time to make it. Run, Sahara, run!"

But my pen falters when I try to describe what happened. The yells of the crowd and players had inspired a new sensation in my heart — somethin' I had never known before. There is no other name for it but fear. I thought horsemen were chasin' me, and my sole desire was to hide. Half way between third and home was a sandy stretch. Droppin' on my knees I stuck my face in the sand. Then, I breathed a sigh of relief.

"No one can see this here ostrich now," I thought. "I'm safe from pursuit as long as my head is in the sand."

Then the ball plunked into the mitt of the third baseman, and he ran up and tagged me and our chance to tie the game was over. I had pitched the most wonderful game ever twirled against big leaguers. I had struck out twenty-six out of a possible twenty-seven, hit one and passed four, and lost my own game because the ostrich in me riz superior to the man.

I met Doc Bings at the gate, and he was weepin'. He had seen it all in a flash.

"Skaggsy, old boy," he said, "I'm sorry. I don't care about my loss, but it's because I've fastened such a terrible thing on you. Why, man, you may even begin to grow ostrich plumes instead of whiskers."

"Never mind, Doc," I said. "All I want is somethin' to eat — somethin' satisfyin'. No ordinary grub for me after this. If you'll stake me to the price of a pocketful of assorted nails, you and me are square."

A Bad Citizen.*

BY WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE.

S the sun went down Powell crept out from the mesquite where he had been lying. He turned his face, bloodless with the prison pallor, toward the magnificent crimson glow that flooded the western sky above the notched mountain line. Six years he had hungered for it, for the smell of the desert dust and wind in his nostrils, for the look of the gaunt hills with that thin smoke-blue film upon them. This had been life to him, the breath of his being.

Now he had come back to his own, but he felt himself an outsider, no longer a part of it. The instinctive physical delight in it all had been stamped out of him. He had gone in young, vigorous, lance-straight. He had come out a broken man, still under thirty but with the youth in him quenched. Like a wounded wild beast he had stolen back to his lair to die. Only one instinct of life was still strong in him, the one that had buoyed him all the long days and nights of his confinement. He would pay first the debt of hate he owed.

Almost at his feet a cabin nestled in a little grove of live oaks. Listlessly he wondered whose it was, for it had not been there when last he had been here. As he stood irresolute there came to him on the wind the wail of a childish treble. It took his feet slowly along the ridge to a point from which he could look down upon a little chap entangled in the cholla half way up a trail that zigzagged along the edge of the bluff. But a few seconds were necessary to release the youngster and set him safely on the path.

At sight of his large-framed emaciated rescuer the crying stilled. The little boy forgot to sob. His whole big-eyed attention was absorbed in contemplation of this unshaven, haggard stranger with the lank black hair and the hollow-chested stoop.

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For a week Powell had starved in the chaparral while he dodged his pursuers, and the marks of the hunted wolf were plentiful on him.

"Hello! What makes you do that?" the four-year-old wondered aloud.

For there had come upon the man a violent paroxysm of coughing which left him leaning limp and exhausted against the face of an out-cropping boulder.

"What you doing here?" the man gasped as soon as he could find breath.

"I tum to look for my Daddie."

"Who are you? What's your name?"

"Luke Shane," the sprat announced. "And I tan spell it," he added proudly by an afterthought.

The name stabbed the outlaw. Not for six years had he heard it spoken aloud, not since the owner of it — his best friend — had stood in the witness box and sworn him into the penitentiary to save himself. This fair-haired handsome little fellow must be the son of Luke Shane. The man then had prospered, had married and no doubt been happy, while he rotted in that hellhole where they had shut him up. He could see no look of his father about the boy, the sight of whom struck vaguely some other chord of memory. Somewhere before he had seen that same trick of a twisted, dimpling, little half smile.

Always he had nursed his revenge, hugged the thought of it. It came now as a spur to his hatred that Luke Shane, the coward and traitor who had turned State's evidence, had found the love and joy out of which he had cheated him. For there had been a girl, a tall slim girl with the sound of laughter in her voice. And the chill walls of the prison had shut him out of Teseda's life.

He had come back furtively, under cover of night. His one thought had been to find Luke Shane before they recaptured him. The settlements he had avoided with the cunning instinct of the hunted. Ranch houses he had visited only stealthily to steal his food. He had spoken to few and asked no questions. For he dared not direct suspicion toward himself. But his lucky star had guided

him straight to the home of the man he meant to kill. Craftily he questioned.

"Where is your Daddy, Kid?"

"Don to town," the little man lisped.

"Did he say when he was coming back?"

"No-o. He jes' tums when he's weady."

Powell mapped his campaign. He would go to the house and get something to eat. Then he would go on down the trail and waylay Shane in the darkness.

The youngster slipped his warm little hand into that of Powell and led the way. All his childish troubles had vanished. As he pattered down the trail his gay confidence was like a slanted sunbeam in a world all gray. The simple mind of the man was troubled. He wanted to have no compunction for the thing he was going to do. "Muzzie," "Daddie," "Baby," these were words long unfamiliar to him. In the wild turbulent days of his youth they had meant nothing. They stood now for all that he had missed and never could have. Strange thoughts disturbed him. Angrily he tried to put them aside, for they were not in harmony with that single-minded purpose that had become an obsession.

Lamps had just been lit in the adobe cabin, and through the open door Powell could see the young mother as she moved lightly about, setting the table. Her back was turned to him, but the poise of the body, the rhythm of its motion, held him spellbound. She was singing softly an old-fashioned lullaby, and at sound of that voice memories stirred uneasily. He stopped, his nerves responding to a strange emotion.

She must have heard the happy lilt of the youngster's voice, for she caught up her baby and came swiftly to the door.

"Luke."

For an instant he knew a crash of the senses. Teseda! The wife of his enemy!

Again "Luke," she cried, softly.

For the man in the shadows all that he had missed was expressed in that one buoyant word, in the eager, radiant face divinely tender with love. He saw it all — what he had been robbed of wholly and forever.

The best in his life had always centered round her. It rallied now instinctively to defend her even from the knowledge of who he was.

"No, ma'am. I reckon you're mistaken. I done picked your boy up out of the cactus and brought him home. I'll be going," he said, huskily, and before the shaken words were out of his mouth had turned and plunged into the gathering darkness.

He fled through the night in a tumult of emotion. It beat on him in waves, for the time carrying him off his feet. He had thought himself dead, save for the one overwhelming purpose that animated him. But so fiercely was he driven that he did not know the cactus thorns shredded his clothes and tore cruelly his flesh. Primeval instincts old as Eden rode him savagely.

Not till he sank down from sheer physical exhaustion did he stop. There came over him again a spasm of coughing, so long and deep it racked him to the marrow. The doctor at the penitentiary had given him a few months to live. With amazing gameness he had made his escape and dragged himself a hundred miles to have five minutes alone with Luke Shane. Through all the stress of his feeling he never let go of this. What he had come to do he must do.

He worked his way back to the trail running down to the mesa. Slowly he moved now, for it would not do to be seized by one of his coughing spells at the critical moment.

After carefully examining his revolver he sat down on a hillock close to the trail. Hours passed, but he never moved except to relax his stiffened muscles. In his whole tense attitude there was the patient vigilance of a beast of prey crouched for the kill. One seeing him there so still, black-eyed and expressionless, would never have guessed him the prey of such conflicting fires. But a flame that had long lain banked in him, smothered almost to death by the ashes of bitterness and despair, was active again and fighting for its life against the stark, ruthless purpose that had carried him so many weary miles. The hard flinty will of him was resolved to go on with the thing, but he could not drive from him the sight of Teseda's happiness — that joy he was about to blot out forever and ever.

Far across the desert something popped. On the wind came very faintly a bunch of firecrackers. Powell rose, every nerve alert. Some one had fired a rifle. Others — four or five at least — had answered the challenge. Tensely he waited, but silence had again settled over the night.

It was many minutes later that there came the faintest tinkle of an iron shoe on shale. He stretched himself and moved noiselessly on his feet to make sure his cramped muscles would not betray him. Also he massaged the fingers of his numbed right hand. By the rapid pounding of the horse's hoofs he knew the animal was being driven hard as it labored up the steep hillside. To guess the rider one flying for his life was not hard. After he had stepped out upon the path and brought the pony to a slithering halt, the white hunted face turned toward him confirmed his impression without words.

"Don't move," he ordered sharply, to check a half involuntary motion of the rifle lying across the saddle.

The weak chin of the man in the saddle quivered. "Wes Powell."

"Get down."

The rider obeyed. His hands were trembling so that the weapon in them shook.

"I've come for to kill you, Luke Shane."

The ranchman moistened his parched lips. "Don't do that, Wes. I didn't go for to testify against you. They done drove me to it."

The burning sunken eyes of the sick man did not move from his face. "I didn't round on *you*. I stood the gaff. You threw me down like a coyote, sent me to that hell, robbed me of everything I had to live for. You've got to pay."

"My God, I can't die! I've got a wife and two children." Tiny sweat beads stood out on the man's damp forehead.

"You stole them from me, too. I never once guessed it, but I know now why you gave evidence against me. You wanted to get me out of your road."

"No, I swear I didn't. I've been sorry a hundred times. You don't understand. They sweated me. They made me come through."

"They tried to make me, too. All you had to do was to keep your mouth shut. They couldn't have proved a thing against either of us. But you always were a quitter. You couldn't game it out, or else you didn't want to. By God, you can't lie down on me and get away with it."

What Powell said was true. They had done their foolish piece of lawlessness together while drunk, had been suspected, and arrested. The Cattleman's Association had wanted to make an example, and they had been the first to be caught in its drag-net. But the evidence had been incomplete. The prisoners had been put through the third degree. One had shown himself a man, and the other had not.

"I hadn't ought to have done it, Wes," the ranchman pleaded.

"I wasn't nothing then but a wild young colt. Say I did help you rustle them 3-C calves. 'Twasn't anything but kid foolishness. They took me and stomped my life out. I've had hell a-plenty, and now I'm a dying man. Last Friday I broke jail jes' to kill you. Nothing could have kept me alive over that desert but the thought I was going to settle with you."

"It would kill Teseda. God, man, didn't a woman ever love you?"

"One was just about to, but you robbed me of that along with all the rest. I can't make you suffer like I done, not a hundredth part of it. I can't drag out your death for six years. All I can do is to stomp you out like I would a rattler."

From the valley came again the sound of a rifle, this time nearer and clearer. In their absorption both men had forgotten the hunt.

"What's it about?" demanded Powell, with a slight movement of the head toward the valley.

"Must a-seen something moving and thought it was me. I gave them the slip down there, but they're right on my trail again. I got no show to get away."

"What are they huntin' you for?"

"I got crazy drunk and held up Sam Black's saloon. First break I've made in six years. Ain't touched liquor before once — not once."

"Did they recognize you?"

"No, I was masked. But they seen my horse. Followed me right out of town. Go ahead. Kill me. It don't make any difference. They will if you don't."

For six years society had sinned against Powell. It had hammered him from a kindly amicable youth into a bitter revengeful savage. Some hours earlier he would have killed without compunction, with a fierce delight, this man who had ruined his life. But his spirit had known a change. He saw a vision of a woman singing, her babies round her, the dewy freshness of youth still clinging to her.

Abruptly he spoke. "Gimme that rifle. Now your hat — and your coat. Hit the trail for home. I'll attend to this job."

"What are you going to do?" the amazed ranchman faltered.

"Oh, go to hell. It ain't for you I'm doin' it."

Powell pulled himself slowly to the saddle and sat there for a minute coughing in another racking attack. As soon as he could speak he turned savagely upon Shane.

"Get out, I tell you. If they ask questions say I held you up and took the horse away before the saloon was robbed."

Already the horses of the pursuers could be heard as they struck the shale of the steep hill. The convict plunged into the mesquite and rode for a hundred yards rapidly, then fired twice into the air.

The hunt closed upon him. Rifles cracked one after another. He cantered into an open stretch of moonlit desert, abandoning the shelter of the thick shrubbery. Half-way across a bullet reached his heart.

They found him lying crumpled up where he had fallen.

A man bending over him looked up quickly and surprise spoke in his voice.

"It's Wes Powell, boys."

"He broke out last week. Likely he stole Shane's horse and held up the saloon."

"Maybe we got the wrong man," a third suggested.

From the pocket of the dead man's coat the first speaker drew a crumpled bit of cloth that had been used as a mask.

"No, I reckon not."

"Well, he was a bad citizen. Began his meanness just as soon as he got out. We're well shet of him."

"That's right," indorsed a new speaker.

Public Opinion voiced itself in silent nods of agreement. Yes, he was a bad citizen. No doubt about that. The country was well rid of him.

A quarter of an hour later a white-faced man crept into the grove of live oaks surrounding the cabin. He moved noiselessly, but the waiting woman saw his approach.

"Luke! Luke!" she cried.

"Yes, Teseda," he answered.

Instantly she was in his arms, betwixt tears and happy laughter.

"I've been so frightened. There was a man here. He acted so strange. Oh, I'm *glad* you're back."

The man spoke tremulously. "Honey, I'm glad, too. God, I'm glad!"

She looked up quickly, anxiety in her eyes. "Is something wrong, Luke? Are you troubled?"

"No — no. I was thinking of that man. He might a-done you a meanness. But it's all right now. It's all right."

With his arm about her waist they went into the lamplit house together and shut the door. A warm fire of piñon knots crackled in the grate. The savory odor of steak and onions rose from the stove. Upon the cot slept the two children that called him "Daddie."

He shuddered, for he knew that somewhere on the desert what had lately been a man lay with sightless eyes and stared at night's million stars — and that man might have been he. But after all Wes Powell had been a bad citizen. He knew in his heart a fear that had never been quieted was lifted from his mind. Better the way it was! He had had his lesson. Fervently he promised himself to live straight from this hour.

He kissed his wife and spoke cheerfully. "My, but I'm hungry. Let's have supper, honey."

The Fossil.*

BY CRITTENDEN MARRIOTT.

EVERYBODY in Fairport knew Henry Colfax. Henry had grown up with Fairport. When he was born Fairport was a village; in the thirty years of his life it had expanded — physically — into a good-sized city, though it still retained most of the ear marks of the village. Everybody took a profound interest in the doings of everybody else; nobody hesitated to criticise the actions of anybody else; the two newspapers "joshed" the young men and the young girls with delightful impartiality; and when they had no one else to cut at they took a fall out of Henry Colfax.

Not that they — or anybody — disliked Henry. Quite the contrary. Everybody liked him in a pitying sort of way. He was so gentle, so kind — and so incapable — that he had probably never inspired an active dislike in any one. Man and boy he had gone his inoffensive way, blinking behind his spectacles, never too busy to do a kindness to any one; always too preoccupied to seize any of the chances of life as they flitted past. He had become an institution — as much a part of Fairport as the homely old village pump. When some of the progressives had made an effort to remove this a few years before the town had risen in rebellion; what it would do if something threatened to remove Henry Colfax was not yet of record. Meanwhile the papers poked fun at him, and most people took the limping wit as a matter of course.

Not all people, however. Bessie Norton resented it hotly, all the more hotly that Henry did not resent it himself.

Bessie Norton was a year or two younger than Henry, and she had lived next door to him all her life. He, she, they had been in love with each other ever since he wore knickers and she

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wore pinafores — or whatever the things are called. But Bessie had declared years before that she would never marry a nonentity; and Henry had sadly admitted that he was, if anything, less than a nonentity. So they had lived on, door by door, year after year, each yearning for the other, but each incapable — Henry incapable of blazing out as a celebrity, and Bessie incapable of lighting the fire that would touch him off.

But Bessie did not fail for want of trying. She did not nag, but she did keep up a steady pressure. At last on a certain spring evening, she burst out:

"Oh! Henry!" she wailed. "Why haven't you done something with your life? I don't mean make money. I don't mean become famous. I mean — I mean — Why don't you *do* something? You've got more brains than Jack Roberts or Willie McCrew or Frank Radcliffe or — or — any of them. Yet they are prosperous; they are looked up to and listened to; and you — you are fooling away your life over that collection of yours. Oh! I could love you so much if you would once — just once —"

Henry shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid I'm no good, Bessie," he admitted, humbly. "Something's been left out of me and —"

"I know! I know!" interrupted the girl, in swift contrition. "I know — but surely you can do something to put a stop to these hateful slurs in the papers. Listen to this! With shaking fingers she tried to smooth out the evening paper which a few moments before she had crushed in her hands.

"Here it is!" she quavered. "Listen: 'Our ancient friend, Henry Colfax, found a new fossil yesterday. Look in a mirror, Henry, and you'll find an older one!'"

Henry smiled anxiously. "Oh! that's nothing," he declared. "It's only Jack Roberts's little joke. I don't mind."

"But you ought to mind," insisted the girl, passionately. "You — you — Oh! What's the use?"

"I'm sorry." He very evidently was. "However, there won't be much more of it, I guess, Bessie. I'm going away!"

"Going away!" This was a new idea, and a dismaying one. Miss Norton could not take it in for an instant.

Henry took advantage of her silence. "Yes!" he hurried on. "I never told you, but I — I spent all the money Mother left me long ago. When I went to the Paleontological Congress at Paris last year I had to mortgage the house to get the money, and now the mortgage is due and the lawyers have given me notice that they must have the money or foreclose and — and that's all. The state museum will buy my collection and I must go east and try to get a place somewhere! I'm sorry, but — but I must."

Anxiously he leaned forward, trying to read Bessie's features, but with a half-stifled sob the girl jumped up and fled into the house, leaving him to make his way slowly home. Till late that night he watched the light burning behind her window panes, wondering what could be occupying her.

He did not guess the facts. Miss Norton, though dismayed by the news, was not one to sit quiescent under this or any other blow of fate. Before she slept that night, she had written a letter to Frank Radcliffe, an old schoolfellow, who was secretary to some scientific body or other in Washington. She ended:

". . . So, my dear Frank, you see Henry has come to the end of his resources and is going East to look for a place. Can you not help him for old times' sake? He knows a great deal about fossils, I believe, and if he can get a post to help in some museum, I know he would be delighted, and I don't think he would do any damage. You know I am not rich, but I can spare $10 a week to be added to his salary, if you can manage things so he will not find out — "

Two days afterwards Frank Radcliffe received and read the letter. Then he read it again. Then he chuckled. "Knows a great deal about fossils, does he?" he laughed. "Won't do any damage! Henry Colfax! Good Lord!" He sprang up and ran into the office of the president of his institution. After a while he went back to his desk and sent off a dozen cablegrams and some telegrams. One of the latter, addressed to Bessie Norton, ran as follows:

"Everything all right. Leave for Fairport Thursday. Tell Henry to sit tight till I arrive."

Five days later Radcliffe was in Fairport. Instead of seeking out Henry or Bessie, however, he went to the office of the Fair-

port *Blade,* and laid certain facts before Mr. Jack Roberts, editor of that paper — he whose idea of humor had stirred Miss Norton to such wrath.

Roberts was an opinionated fellow, and his convictions died hard. But he was a good newspaper man and knew when to switch. Incidentally he knew the exact value of a scoop. Hence, the *Blade* that afternoon screamed at its readers in red type as follows:

"Once more one of Fairport's sons has won world-wide fame. Our esteemed fellow-citizen, Mr. Henry Colfax, who has so long, so arduously, and so modestly labored in the cause of science, has at last gained the fame which the *Blade* has so long prophesied for him — the honor and recognition of the world.

"Mr. Frank Radcliffe, secretary of the Carmody University, arrived in our beautiful city to-day, bringing with him cablegrams from the secretaries of the Royal Paleontological Society of England, the Societe Paleontogique of France, the Academy of Sciences of St. Petersburg, The Royal-Imperial Geological Society of Berlin, and half a dozen lesser bodies, stating that these societies had conferred on our distinguished savant, Mr. Henry Colfax, who honors Fairport by his presence, no less than five degrees and three fellowships, each of which carries with it a substantial pecuniary reward. Mr. Radcliffe brought also resolutions from the Cinquieme Congress Geologique Universale, now in session at Paris, hailing Mr. Colfax as the greatest living authority on the early Pliocene, and stating that more than any man living he had contributed to the world's knowledge of the Tertiary.

"The news that these well-earned honors have been bestowed will delight, but will not surprise, those who have watched Mr. Colfax's researches during the past twenty years, and have witnessed the steady growth of his reputation in the scientific world. Fairport honors him as he honors Fairport.

"Incidentally Mr. Colfax's many friends will rejoice to hear that Mr. Radcliffe also brings word that the Carmody University has voted a grant of $10,000 a year to Mr. Colfax, so that he may be able to continue the studies into the fossils that have so distinguished Fairport!"

Radcliffe chuckled over this last sentence as, paper in hand, he trolleyed out to Bessie Norton's suburban cottage. "Truer than you meant, Roberts," he murmured. "Truer than you meant."

The moon was on duty that night when Radcliffe departed, leaving Bessie and Henry, stunned with amazement, behind him. Fairport was a beautiful place, especially in its suburbs, and it outdid itself that night. Hundreds of fireflies twinkled among the bushes. Great white moths fluttered over the roses that shut in Bessie's porch. The darting night birds whirred overhead, through the rustling trees. A soft wind came up with the perfumed dusk, and bore the far-off music of the rippling river clearly to the ears.

Suddenly Bessie turned to Henry with a sob. "Why didn't you tell me?" she cried. "Why did you let me think that you were incapable — you whom the whole learnèd world was delighting to honor! I can understand why you did not tell Fairport! If Fairport was too blind to see, it was right to leave it in blindness. You — No, let me speak — you were right to scorn it. But I, your friend! I who loved you and so longed that you should be great! I deserve to be punished! Ah, yes! I deserve to be scorned with the rest! But — but it wasn't like you; it wasn't like your loving kindness — "

"Hush! Hush! Oh! Hush!" No longer to be restrained, Henry broke in upon the girl's words. "Good Heavens!" he cried, "I don't scorn any one — any one; least of all you! How could I scorn you when I love you so? You know it! I have loved you all my life! How could I scorn you?"

Pleadingly he stretched his arms toward her and she slipped into them. "But — but —" The words came very faint, half-smothered in his coat collar — "but why didn't you tell me you were famous?"

Henry chuckled. "I didn't know it myself," he declared. "I didn't even suspect it till Radcliffe told me so. Honest Injun! I didn't."

The Mahout.*

BY CLARK ASHTON SMITH.

ARTHUR MERTON, British Resident at Jizapur, and his cousin, John Hawley, an Agra newspaper editor, who had run down into Central India for a few weeks' shooting at Merton's invitation, reined in their horses just outside the gates of Jizapur. The Maharajah's elephants, a score of the largest and finest "tuskers" in Central India, were being ridden out for their daily exercise. The procession was led by Rajah, the great elephant of State, who towered above the rest like a warship amongst merchantmen. He was a magnificent elephant, over twelve feet from his shoulders to the ground, and of a slightly lighter hue than the others, who were of the usual muddy gray. On the ends of his tusks gleamed golden knobs.

"What a kingly animal!" exclaimed Hawley, as Rajah passed.

As he spoke, the mahout, or driver, who had been sitting his charge like a bronze image, turned and met Hawley's eyes. He was a man to attract attention, this mahout, as distinctive a figure among his brother mahouts as was Rajah among the elephants. He was apparently very tall, and of a high-caste type, the eyes proud and fearless, the heavy beard carefully trimmed, and the face cast in a handsome, dignified mold.

Hawley gave a second exclamation as he met the mahout's gaze and stared at the man hard. The Hindu, after an impressive glance, turned his head and the elephant went on.

"I could swear that I have seen that man before," said Hawley, at his cousin's interrogatory expression. "It was near Agra, about six years ago, when I was out riding one afternoon. My horse, a nervous, high-strung Waler, bolted at sight of an umbrella which some one had left by the roadside. It was im-

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possible to stop him, indeed, I had all I could do to keep on. Suddenly, the Hindu we have just passed, or his double, stepped out into the road and grabbed the bridle. He was carried quite a distance, but managed to keep his grip, and the Waler finally condescended to stop. After receiving my thanks with a dignified depreciation of the service he had done me, the Hindu disappeared, and I have not seen him since.

"It is scarcely probable, though, that this mahout is the same," Hawley resumed, after a pause. "My rescuer was dressed as a high-caste, and it is not conceivable that such a one would turn elephant driver."

"I know nothing of the man," said Merton, as they rode on into the city. "He has been Rajah's mahout ever since I came here a year ago. Of course, as you say, he cannot be the man who stopped your horse. It is merely a chance resemblance."

The next afternoon, Hawley was out riding alone. He had left the main road for a smaller one running into the jungle, intending to visit a ruined temple of which Merton had told him. Suddenly he noticed elephant tracks in the dust, exceedingly large ones, which he concluded could have been made only by Rajah. A momentary curiosity as to why the elephant had been ridden off into the jungle, and also concerning the mahout, led Hawley to follow the tracks when the road branched and they took the path opposite to the one that he had intended to follow. In a few minutes he came to a spot of open ground in the thick, luxuriant jungle, and reined in quickly at what he saw there.

Rajah stood in the clearing, holding something in his trunk which Hawley at first glance took to be a man, dressed in a blue and gold native attire, and with a red turban. Another look told him that it was merely a dummy — some old clothes stuffed with straw. As he watched, the mahout gave a low command, reenforced with a jab behind the ear from his ankus, or goad. Rajah gave an upward swing with his trunk, and released his hold on the figure, which flew skyward for at least twenty feet, and then dropped limply to earth. The mahout watched its fall with an expression of what seemed malevolence upon his face, though Hawley might have been mistaken as to this at the distance. He gave another command, and a jab at the elephant's

cheek — a peculiar, quick thrust, at which Rajah picked the dummy up and placed it on his back behind the mahout in the place usually occupied by the howdah. The Hindu directing, the figure was again seized and hurled into the air.

Much mystified, Hawley watched several repetitions of this strange performance, but was unable to puzzle out what it meant. Finally, the mahout caught sight of him, and rode the elephant hastily away into the jungle on the opposite side of the clearing. Evidently he did not wish to be observed or questioned. Hawley continued his journey to the temple, thinking over the curious incident as he went. He did not see the mahout again that day.

He spoke of what he had seen to Merton that evening, but his cousin paid little attention to the tale, saying that no one could comprehend anything done by natives, and that it wasn't worth while to wonder at their actions anyway. Even if one could find the explanation, it wouldn't be worth knowing.

The scene in the jungle recurred to Hawley many times, probably because of the resemblance of the mahout to the man who had stopped his horse at Agra. But he could think of no plausible explanation of what he had seen. At last he dismissed the matter from his mind altogether.

At the time of Hawley's visit, great preparations were being made for the marriage of the Maharajah of Jizapur, Krishna Singh, to the daughter of the neighboring sovereign. There was to be much feasting, firing of guns, and a gorgeous procession. All the Rajahs, Ranas, and Thakurs, etc., for a radius of at least a hundred miles, were to be present. The spectacle, indeed, was one of the inducements that had drawn Hawley down into Central India.

After two weeks of unprecedented activity and excitement in the city of Jizapur, the great day came, with incessant thunder of guns from the Maharajah's palace during all the forenoon, as the royalty of Central India arrived with its hordes of picturesque, tattered, dirty retainers and soldiery. Each king or dignitary was punctiliously saluted according to his rank, which in India is determined by the number of guns that may be fired in his honor.

At noon a great procession, the Maharajah heading it, issued from the palace to ride out and meet the bride and her father and attendants, who were to reach Jizapur at that hour.

Hawley and Merton watched the pageant from the large and many-colored crowd that lined the roadside without the city gates. As Rajah, the great State elephant emerged, with Krishna Singh in the gold-embroidered howdah, or canopied seat, on his back, a rising cloud of dust in the distance proclaimed the coming of the bride and her relatives.

Behind the Maharajah came a number of elephants, bearing the nobles and dignitaries of Jizapur, and the neighboring princes. Then emerged richly caparisoned horses, with prismatically-attired riders — soldiers and attendants. Over this great glare of color and movement was the almost intolerable light of the midday Eastern sun.

The two Englishmen were some distance from the city gates, so that when the Maharajah's slow, majestic procession passed them, that of the bride was drawing near — a similar one, and less gorgeous only because it was smaller.

Perhaps fifty yards separated the two when something happened to bring both processions to a halt. Hawley, who happened at the moment to be idly watching the elephant Rajah, and his driver, saw the mahout reach swiftly forward and stab the animal's cheek with his goad, precisely as he had done on that day in the jungle when Hawley had come unexpectedly upon him. Probably no one else noticed the action, or, if they did, attached any importance to it in the excitement that followed.

As he had reached with his trunk for the dummy seated on his back, so Rajah reached into the howdah and grasped Krishna Singh about the waist. In an instant the astonished, terror-stricken Maharajah was dangling in mid-air where the elephant held him poised a moment. Then, in spite of the shouts, commands, and blows of his mahout, Rajah began to swing Krishna Singh to and fro, slowly at first, but with a gradually increasing speed. It was like watching a giant pendulum. The fascinated crowd gazed in a sudden and tense silence for what seemed to them hours, though they were really only seconds, before the

elephant, with a last vicious upward impetus of his helpless victim, released his hold.

Krishna Singh soared skyward, a blot of gold and red against the intense, stark, blazing azure of the Indian sky. To the horror-stricken onlookers he seemed to hang there for hours, before he began to fall back from the height to which the giant elephant had tossed him as one would toss a tennis-ball. Hawley turned away, unable to look any longer, and in an instant heard the hollow, lifeless thud as the body struck the ground.

The sound broke the spell of horror and amazement that had held the crowd, and a confused babble arose, interspersed with a few wails and cries. One sharp shriek came from the curtained howdah of the bride. The Maharajah's body guard at once galloped forward and formed a ring about the body. The crowd, to whom the elephant had gone "musth," or mad, began to retreat and disperse.

Hawley, in a few words, told his cousin of what he had seen the mahout do, and his belief that the elephant's action had thus been incited.

The two Englishmen went to the captain of the body-guard, who was standing by the side of the fallen Maharajah. Krishna Singh lay quite dead, his neck broken by the fall. The Captain, upon being informed of what Hawley had seen, directed some of his men to go in search of the mahout, who, in the confusion, had slipped from Rajah's neck, disappearing no one knew where. Their search was unsuccessful, nor did a further one, continued for over a week, reveal any trace of the elephant-driver.

But several days afterward Hawley received a letter, bearing the Agra postmark. It was in a hand unfamiliar to him and written in rather stiff, though perfectly correct English, such as an educated native would write. It was as follows:

To Hawley Sahib:

I am the man who stopped the Sahib's horse near Agra one day, six years ago. Because I have seen in the Sahib's eyes that he recognizes and remembers me, I am writing this. He will then understand much that has puzzled him.

My father was Krishna Singh's half-brother. Men who bore my father an enmity, invented evidence of a plot on his part to murder Krishna Singh and seize the throne. The Maharajah, bearing him little love and being of an intensely suspicious nature, required little proof to believe this, and caused my father and several others of the family to be seized and thrown into the palace dungeons. A few days later, without trial, they were led out and executed by the "Death of the Elephant." Perchance

the Sahib has not heard of this. The manner of it is thus: The condemned man is made to kneel with his head on a block of stone, and an elephant, at a command from the driver, places one of his feet on the prisoner's head, killing him, of course, instantly.

I, who was but a youth at the time, by some inadvertence was allowed to escape, and made my way to Agra, where I remained several years with some distant relatives, learning, in that time, to speak and write English. I was intending to enter the service of the British Raj, when an idea of revenge on Krishna Singh for my father's death, suddenly sprang into full conception. I had long plotted, forming many impracticable and futile plans for vengeance, but the one that then occurred to me seemed possible, though extremely difficult. As the Sahib has seen, it proved successful.

I at once left Agra, disguising myself as a low-caste, and went to Burma, where I learned elephant-driving — a work not easy for one who has not been trained to it from boyhood. In doing this, I sacrificed my caste. In my thirst for revenge, however, it seemed but a little thing.

After four years in the jungle I came to Jizapur and, being a skilled and fully accredited mahout, was given a position in the Maharajah's stables. Krishna Singh never suspected my identity, for I had changed greatly in the ten years since I had fled from Jizapur, and who would have thought to find Kshatriya in the person of such a low-caste elephant-driver?

Gradually, for my skill and trustworthiness, I was advanced in position, and at last was entrusted with the State elephant, Rajah. This was what I had long been aiming at, for on my attaining the care of Krishna Singh's own elephant depended the success or failure of my plan.

This position obtained, my purpose was but half-achieved. It was necessary that the elephant be trained for his part, and this, indeed, was perhaps the most difficult and dangerous part of my work. It was not easy to avoid observation, and detection was likely to prove fatal to me and to my plan. On that day when the Sahib came upon me in the jungle, I thought my scheme doomed, and prepared to flee. But evidently no idea of the meaning of the performance in the jungle entered the Sahib's mind.

At last came my day of revenge, and after the Maharajah's death I succeeded in miraculously escaping, though I had fully expected to pay for my vengeance with my own life. I am safe now — not all the police and secret emissaries in India can find me.

The death that my father met has been visited upon his murderer, and the shadow of those dreadful days and of that unavenged crime has at last been lifted from my heart. I go forth content, to face life and fate calmly, and with a mind free and untroubled.

A Bridegroom's Substitute.*

BY MARY VAN BRUNT HUNTER.

[This story appeared in THE BLACK CAT eight years ago and is reprinted by request.]

THE parlor car Uarda was last in the vestibuled train. Even beneath the shadow of the station roof its glories of brass and nickel plate, of shining paint and varnish, gleamed with but slightly diminished splendor. At the front platform stood a porter, immaculate in uniform, ebony in complexion. Within, the passengers were arranging their belongings and making themselves at home in their sections.

The hands of the station clock pointed to the moment of departure. The final signal had been given. A short, incisive whistle sounded from the engine. Placing his step on the platform the porter waved a friendly adieu to the white-capped cook on a neighboring dining-car, when through the gate came hurrying a belated pair. They dashed breathlessly across intervening tracks, reaching the Uarda at the first slow revolution of the wheels. Seizing the girl on either side, her companion and the porter swung her to the vestibule. The man swiftly followed. Catching bags and umbrellas, the porter scrambled hastily after. Cheers of congratulation came from the cook and waiters. The interested onlookers smiled and again pursued their devious ways. The wheels revolved more and more swiftly, a shrill, prolonged whistle pierced the air, a bell clanged loudly, and the train rolled out from beneath the station roof.

"Close call, dat, sah!" grinned the porter, as the girl, flushed and laughing, paused in the narrow passage to adjust her hair and hat.

"You're right, George," answered the man. "Here."

Into the porter's outstretched hand dropped something large and shining.

With thanks he slipped it in his pocket.

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"Spec's dey oughter be some rice on dat, sah," he added, his practised eye glancing swiftly over the garments of pristine newness, the bags plainly in service for the first time, the snugly rolled umbrellas. Only the golf bags and their contents showed evidence of use.

"Right again, George," laughed the man easily. "Take these traps to the drawing-room. I engaged one here somewhere."

He stepped forward to the girl, who was pinning a final rebellious lock.

"Wasn't that a race for life?" she said, with enjoyment. "Didn't we sprint across those tracks? Every one was laughing, but I don't care. We're off, and they're all standing around in the hall with their hands full of silly rice and old shoes. How foolish they will feel when they find we are gone!"

They walked the length of the car to the drawing-room, followed by admiring, interested glances. Both were young, well-looking and well-attired. The man's suit and top coat were plainly the product of a Fifth Avenue tailor. The cloth gown of the girl fitted her slim figure with an elegance giving proof that on the inner belt, inscribed in flowing gilt lines, might be read a name famous in the fashionable world.

"How delightful to go off like this!" she continued, as they settled themselves in their compartment. "If they had all come with us to the train everybody would know that we are just starting on our wedding journey. As it is, no one will ever dream of such a thing."

"Certainly not!" he agreed, mendaciously. "Not a grain of rice about us" — "as the porter observed," he was about to add, but checked himself in time.

"You were so clever to think of the back stairway and alley," she said, with admiration. "And the second carriage, too. I suppose the other one is still waiting in front." She laughed in sheer delight.

"I trust some fool hasn't tied white ribbons on the trunks," he rejoined meditatively. "People are such idiots at these times. When Maude and Tom went away some one sent a pair of turtle doves, in a cage adorned with white ribbons, to be presented to them on the car. It was to escape these pleasing attentions that I

said we would take the Philadelphia train, and here we are headed up the Hudson."

"I'm glad you gave me time to let the girls at Vassar know. They will be at the station, I'm sure — the six left of our 'Octa Gamma Club' since Elizabeth and I graduated. I did want them here to-day, but papa is *so* opposed to large weddings. And then between us we have such a troop of relatives," she finished with a sigh.

"Yes, it's wearing," he responded, feelingly. "Well, the ordeal is over, and we'll have simply an ideal wedding journey, Katherine — no swell hotels full of bores, no dinner toilets and hops. Just the Adirondacks, some fishing and hunting, and a try at the links somewhere. By the way, did you pack your old tramping suit?"

"Yes, indeed; and I suppose you will live in those hideous hunting clothes. It will be just as it was last summer, when we first found out — "

"That we were made for one another." He finished with his arm about her, her head nestled to his shoulder in the attitude favored by travelling brides since time immemorial, and they lost themselves in delightful reminiscences.

Sometime later, in the midst of tender "do you remembers," her hand sought her hair.

"It is shaking!" she said, rising. "Besides, the conductor might come any minute. Please give me my little bag. I must make myself presentable. Our mad rush was too much for the elaborate coiffure that went with my wedding gown."

She stood before the mirror, one hand removing hat and hairpins, the other outstretched for the bag. He glanced at the empty racks, then along the cushions.

"Why, I don't see it, dear."

Katherine turned swiftly. One long waving brown lock fell on her shoulder. Her eyes were startled.

"But it must be there!" She swooped to the suitcases standing on the floor, dislodged golf bags and umbrellas from their resting places, glanced in her turn at the racks. With the energy of increasing alarm, she shook his overcoat, her jacket, and finally the hat she had just taken from her head, as though the bag

might be concealed among its roses. Then she faced him tragically.

"Howard! it had my jewelry — everything! the lovely sunburst you gave me — auntie's pearl necklace! What *shall* we do?"

The situation revealed itself more gradually to his slower comprehension.

"All your jewelry?" he began in true masculine fashion. "Why did you bring it? to the mountains in June! No — I didn't mean that," he added in quick repentance. "Of course — "

"Oh, I don't know why!" she moaned. "We rushed so — I didn't think. I just put them all in a bag with my purse — Howard, aren't you going to *do* something?"

"Where did you have it last? Think, dear."

"I had it — oh, let me see!" she paused to summon all her forces. "In the carriage; no, running through the station it was in my hand. Wasn't it?" she questioned him fiercely. "Oh, dear, I can't tell! Don't you remember?"

"But, dearest," he tried to quiet her. "Be calm — you are so agitated — "

"Agitated! Calm!" she repeated his words in scorn. "And lose all my beautiful things? No, we must stop the train — "

She turned wildly to the door, but he caught her in his arms.

"My dear child, you mustn't! With your hair hanging. It would make a shocking scene — we would be in all the papers. I will telegraph. Oh, they will find it in no time! I believe they are stopping now — yes, I'll wire from this station!" He seized his hat as a warning whistle sounded far ahead. "Stay here, Katherine; I'll be back in a moment." The door closed behind his departing figure.

Katherine fastened her dishevelled locks in place slowly, with many distrait pauses. Try as she would to remember, her mind was an absolute blank in regard to the bag. How unutterably stupid she had been! just like the women one reads of in the so-called funny papers, who jump off street-cars backward and go about blandly poking their parasols into other people's eyes. It was beyond hope that she would ever see her lovely things again.

And why did not Howard return? She opened the door wide

as though to hasten him. The telegraph poles were flying by with increasing rapidity. The little station was already miles behind. Seconds count fast on the Empire State Express.

With unseeing eyes Katherine was gazing toward the Palisades when the words, "Tickets, please," reached her ear.

The conductor was rearranging a handful he had already collected. He repeated his request mechanically. Then, as she did not comply, he glanced up sharply.

"I — Howard — the gentleman who is with me — I mean, my husband," she began lamely and concluded in desperation. "He has the tickets, I suppose," she added with hauteur.

"Is he forward?" asked the conductor with official brevity.

"I don't know — yes, he must be. He got off at the last station to send a telegram."

"Got off to send a telegram!" he repeated. "Have you any idea he got on again? Dobbs' Ferry isn't on our schedule — we were signalled; some trouble on the track this morning — but we were detained only thirty seconds."

"It can't be he was *left!*" she exclaimed in incredulous dismay. "Don't tell me so! Why, what should I do?"

"If he's on this train he must have stepped lively." The conductor spoke with conviction. "But don't be uneasy. Trains are passing constantly. He can catch another in twenty minutes."

Small consolation in that, reflected Katherine, bewildered at the avalanche of misfortunes overwhelming this "ideal wedding journey." He could not catch *this* train, which was annihilating space at the rate of a mile a minute. A swift search of the silver chatelaine bag at her belt revealed her resources. One half dollar, one quarter, two dimes and a postage stamp. Surely she could not travel far on the sum of available assets. The conductor was proceeding calmly with his duties. Would he take one of her rings, or a pin? she wondered. What rules and regulations had a soulless corporation for a desperate case like this?

At that moment came striding down the car aisle a man, tall, blond, handsome. With a feeling akin to rapture Katherine recognized Jack Patterson, playmate of her childhood, beau of her dancing-school days, chum of her brother and friend and neighbor always.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried, advancing. Then, as a nearby passenger regarded her curiously over his newspaper, she retreated, sinking to a seat in the stateroom with relief too great for words.

Jack followed.

"How delightful to meet you, Katherine!" he began. "I saw you boarding this train at the last moment. Gave us a false scent, didn't you, saying that you were going Philadelphia way? I'm bound for Albany; Van Zandt's wedding comes off to-night. June's the month, isn't it? Where's Howard, the lucky beggar? I'll take myself off as soon as I've wished you both all the good that's going."

"Oh, Jack, if you wait for Howard!" exclaimed the bride of the woeful countenance. "I'm so glad to see you, you can't imagine! You will help me, won't you, Jack? He's gone! I'm in such a dreadful predicament."

Tears of relief shone in her eyes, and Jack's mystified expression brought hysterical laughter to her lips.

Jack's handsome face grew more and more uneasy. Had Howard — no! impossible! Yet here was one of the dearest girls in the world, married but two short hours, alone, in tears, appealing for aid. What could it mean?

"I lost my bag," gasped Katherine, struggling with mingled emotions. "All my jewelry and my purse. Then Howard got off to telegraph, and now — I've lost him!"

Jack stared — then joined heartily in her laughter.

"Well, that's not so serious. For a moment I was afraid — well — hum — ha — let us see what can be done. And this is all the money you have?" Another peal of laughter at the contents of her hand. "Not enough for a bunch of violets. Really, it's a farcical situation. I'm glad you can see the humor of it."

"I couldn't until you came," she rejoined. "But now it really *is* funny, isn't it? A bride taking her wedding journey all by her lonely self."

"I'll go interview the trainmen," said Jack. "Then I think I'll take my turn at the wires."

He passed through the car smiling, as he composed a message calculated to soothe the troubled soul of the bridegroom. At the door he met the conductor bearing a yellow envelope handed on

board at a recent slow-down. It was addressed to Mrs. Howard Woodrow, and Jack hastened with it to her side. The message read :

Got left all right don't worry come on next train wait at Hotel Kenmore Albany HOWARD

" Good advice — that don't worry," quoth Jack. " Let us proceed to follow it. I'll get a cribbage-board and some cards, and we'll drive dull care away. You used to beat me once, Katherine, before Howard monopolized all your time."

The conductor pocketed Jack's cigars, the porter fingered his dollar with affection. Together they grinned at the situation, agreeing it was " on the bridegroom." By some subtle telepathic influence the state of affairs became known to the other passengers, who watched the progress of the little comedy with obvious interest and amusement. More frequently than usual did the porter's duties call him near the drawing-room, and his eyes rolled sympathetically in that direction each time he passed the open door.

" De bride's commencin' to take notice," he cheerfully informed the conductor on his return from one of these tours of investigation. " Dey'se playin' cyards and laffin' to beat de ban'. Spec's t'udder fellah better catch dat fust train suah, or he fin' heself cut out."

And " t'udder fellah," pacing the platform at Dobbs' Ferry with impatient feet, was extracting what comfort he might from the following telegram :

Ah there Dobbs' Ferry wish you blissful honeymoon Katherine O K I'm your substitute write when you find time JACK PATTERSON
P S Don't worry

The time passed quickly. The familiar hills about Poughkeepsie came in sight, and Katherine's heart misgave her as she remembered the message she had sent " the girls."

" They will all be at the station, six of them. How frightfully awkward to explain ; and how they will laugh ! "

" Don't explain," advised Jack. " Say nothing about it. Just hug 'em all around and talk so fast they can't ask questions."

" Could I carry that off, I wonder ? " she queried doubtfully.

" Sure ! If they persist in asking, tell them — they don't know

Howard, do they ? — well, then tell them he is shy and doesn't want to come out."

The speed of the train slackened. Katherine, peering through the window, caught a glimpse of the station door. The girls were there. She quailed.

"Now for it ! Screw up your courage !" cheered Jack.

"What shall I say ? Oh, Jack, come with me and help me out !"

Jack followed, nothing loath. A chorus of laughing voices greeted Katherine. She was caught in a vortex of shirt-waists and summer hats, kissed, embraced and congratulated.

"But where's the bridegroom ?" some one asked.

Katherine laughed, and blushed guiltily.

"Oh, he's shy," she began ; then hesitated, casting a look for aid toward Jack in the doorway. The eyes of the girls followed hers and Jack encountered a fusillade of admiring glances.

"Shy, is he ?" cried one brave spirit. "Then let us kiss him for his mother, girls !"

Jack found this mistake most diverting, and advanced unabashed to the charge. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, he gaily reflected. The girls were fresh and pretty, it would really be a pity to deprive them of their joke, and since he had been invited — presto ! their half-hearted greetings were met with an ardor and vehemence truly astonishing in a newly made bridegroom, supposed to have eyes — and lips — for but one. With gasps, laughter and shrieks the girls beat a hasty retreat.

Suddenly amid the confusion Jack's eyes met those of a tall brunette on the outskirts of the group, and his heart stood still. They were large, dark eyes with long-lashed lids, and the red mouth beneath them was set in scornful curves. Jack had seen those eyes, that mouth, before. He had dreamed of and sought them ever since. And now to find them when he was playing the clown like this ! All his gaiety vanished, leaving him pale and grave. In that disdainful face he seemed to read :

"And you are Katherine's chosen one ! A *farceur*, a romping fool ! What could she see in you ?"

With a wild idea of explanation he turned toward her.

"All aboard !" called a voice.

"Be careful ; you'll be left !" cried Katherine's agitated tones ; and Jack sprang on board, feeling very small indeed.

"Who is the tall girl ?" he asked as his companion waved a last adieu.

"Oh, that's Elizabeth — Elizabeth Reed, my dearest chum. I was so surprised to see her. She was my classmate, and has been in Europe nearly all the year. They landed Monday and she's here to see her sister, the pretty dark-haired one. Elizabeth is the sweetest thing ! And isn't she a beauty ?"

"Yes, she is a beauty," he agreed briefly, inwardly raging at himself.

"And, oh, Jack !" Katherine burst into merry laughter as they again reached the stateroom. "Wasn't it too funny ? They thought you were Howard ! Isn't that a joke ?"

Jack's answering mirth was hollow, and Katherine's laughter soon ceased, discouraged by his lack of enthusiasm. He sat preoccupied beside her. This was a scurvy trick that Fate had played him. To fall in love with a face, as he had done one night six months before, in Paris ; to chase it over the Continent, to haunt cathedrals, galleries, palaces — all spots, in fact, that most attract tourists, and never to find it again ; this had been bad enough. But to come upon it when he was acting the part of a cheerful idiot, a facetious fool — and a married one at that ! Jack set his teeth, and to himself said things quite unfit for publication.

Katherine, beneath her lashes, studied him attentively.

"Jack," she said finally, "do you know, I've always thought Elizabeth the very girl for you ?"

He kindled.

"You know," she continued, joying in the consciousness of having applied the match to the combustible spot, "to begin with, you are both so tall and handsome."

He bowed with a deprecating shrug.

"Oh, yes — it isn't worth while to deny it. You know it as well as any one ; you've been told it often enough. Then you're so blond and she so *brune*. You're so gay and she so dignified. Certainly it would be an ideal match. When we are settled in our house next winter I shall have her come to visit, and you shall meet her."

"Next winter! As well next century," groaned Jack's despairing soul. Then, fearing his depression was too obvious, he made a desperate struggle to rally.

"Suppose we have another game," he suggested briskly. "We ought to play the rubber before we reach Albany. Do you mind if I leave you after I've seen you made comfortable at the Kenmore?"

Katherine laughed. "Better label me 'To be left until called for,'" she said. "I seem to have developed such a talent for getting into trouble."

"You see, I'm a train later than I promised, as it is," he explained, replacing the ivory pegs in the board and taking up the cards.

. . . . . .

Jack had filled the office of best man too many times to feel any consciousness of his position when, that evening, he and the groom entered the crowded church from the vestry. It was the same old story. Pews filled with well-gowned women, a sprinkling of men, rustling fans, subdued murmur of voices, flowers, palms, strains of the wedding march. Waiting at the chancel rail with impassive countenance, he viewed the advancing bridesmaids with the eye of a connoisseur. Six pretty girls they were, walking with a dignity befitting their state; and far behind them, alone, in gown of trailing, filmy white, tall and stately — Jack's heart gave a sudden leap. It was she!

Could this be the bride? he queried for one anguished instant. No; the great armful of American Beauty roses that she carried reassured him; and enhanced by their glow of rich color were the masses of midnight hair, the crimson lips, the deep, dark eyes that met his eager gaze with one of disdainful recognition.

From that moment Jack became an automaton, fulfilling his duties mechanically. He was dimly conscious of a clergyman and a service, but for aught he knew the bride might have been habited in black. With mingled rapture and trepidation he walked at the side of the beautiful maid of honor as the bridal party left the church.

In the vestibule some one essayed an introduction, explaining the late hour of arrivals.

"We have met before," said Miss Reed's low contralto. Then she turned to Jack and her accusing gaze pierced him through.

"How is Katherine this evening?"

So glacial was her tone that Jack felt a sudden shiver of dismay. Was he really guilty? Had he married Katherine this morning, murdered her this afternoon, and concealed his crime, as this young woman's manner seemed to suggest? Meekly he replied:

"Quite well, I trust."

"But you do not know?" in accents of surprise. "And — since when has it become the fashion for a bridegroom to act as best man?"

Jack's crushed spirit reasserted itself. "There are matrons of honor, sometimes. Why not a benedict, ?" he hazarded, and immediately became aware that his sprightly joke had fallen upon stony ground.

With demeanors of studied inattention they walked together to the carriage, where two bridesmaids were awaiting her. As Jack held the open door, she flashed him an inscrutable glance beneath lowered eyelids. He bent toward her quickly.

"Let me tell you," he said, rapidly, "this evening — later — let me explain all that happened to-day."

"Oh, really — it isn't worth while," she replied, with airy indifference. "I'm not the least interested in the travelling experiences of a Hobson."

Jack closed the door with a somewhat vicious bang, and the carriage rolled away.

Amid the throng of wedding guests that evening he met with no better success. Miss Reed proved an adept in the gentle art of evading a tête-à-tête. Moreover, she seemed to find a malicious pleasure in affording him apparent opportunities which she nipped in the bud with graceful nonchalance. When he bade her good-night he had reached a state where he told himself she was a soulless being, that Katherine's adjective "sweet" was a misnomer, that he hoped he should never see her again.

Did she read his thought? In her eyes lurked a tantalizing smile, and she said, softly:

"And that — explanation?"

But Jack hardened his heart, and bowing low passed on.

The following morning he called at the Kenmore. The birds had flown. "Mr. and Mrs. Woodrow went north at nine o'clock," said the clerk, "but there was a letter; yes, for Mr. John Worthington Patterson."

Jack dropped into a chair in the lobby and opened his letter with languid interest. Perfunctory thanks, he supposed, and really they were delighted to be rid of him. They would not give him another thought while they were gone. Van Zandt, too, with his bride — what did he care, away with the girl he loved? A sensation of loneliness smote Jack's heart. Weddings were certainly dreadful bores. These selfish creatures, pairing off and forming little domestic trusts, left their friends quite out in the cold. Bitterly he agreed that the world was hollow. Then slowly he drew the letter from its envelope and read:

> DEAR OLD MAN: — Your telegram, which was in the way of rubbing it in on the unfortunate, is forgiven in consideration of your kindly offices, and the realistic acting with which you personated yours truly on the journey. The girls all believed you were It, with the sole exception of Elizabeth Reed, who came up from Poughkeepsie with me last night. No doubt you met her at Van's wedding. She has known me a year and had seen you before somewhere — Paris, I think she said. Between ourselves, she seems to consider you a passably decent-looking sort of a chap, but somewhat conceited, and a trifle too promiscuous in your osculatory habits. It will take a little time to square yourself on that last count — you know that's the one thing women can't stand. As Katherine says, you and Elizabeth would make a "lovely pair." Try it, my lovely one — and when you are as happy as I am now, let me be the first to bless you, my children. HOWARD.
>
> P. S. The bag was found in Katherine's dressing-room, where she had carefully concealed it for fear of rice.

Jack sprang from his chair, cramming the letter into his pocket. She remembered him, then! She had really noticed him that night at the theatre — in Paris! Yet — so incomprehensible are the ways of women — though he had gazed until ashamed of his rudeness, she had never once seemed to glance his way. And that asinine performance yesterday — no wonder she thought him a conceited jackanapes who deserved punishment. But, perhaps, if he tried again —

As he reached the sidewalk he glanced at his watch. Half-past eleven. Surely it was his duty to call on Van Zandt's mother and sister before returning to New York. Incidentally, Miss Reed, who was staying with them. He walked briskly. The old town of Albany assumed its most picturesque guise. How blue the sky! how bright the sun! Almost he found himself quoting, "What is so rare as a day in June?" Ideal weather for wedding

journeys. He wished Howard and Katherine, Van Zandt and his bride, the happiest of honeymoons. They all deserved the best, he thought, with a warm gush of enthusiastic friendship.

Thus, beaming alike on the just and the unjust, he reached the handsome old-fashioned mansion of the Van Zandt family.

On the wide porch, in a bevy of chattering girls, he found her — and it seemed to him that the bright morning paled before her glowing beauty.

And oh, wonder of wonders ; joy and rapture ! She came to greet him, giving him her soft white hand with propitiatory smiles, and a bantering friendly light in her glorious eyes.

The Crop of the Night.*

BY MICHAEL WHITE.

IT was surprising. Tucker used a stronger expression, on the whole warranted by the circumstances. This is why Tucker came to straighten himself from the patch of soil he was examining with a puzzled ejaculation on his lips.

In the East Tucker's name was famous as a horticulturist on a big scale. If a gold medal was offered at a state or county fair you might have been pretty sure Tucker's exhibit would win it, and the yearly sum total of his cash prizes made up quite a comfortable fortune.

He had achieved distinction with every flower indigenous to the soil, yet Tucker was not satisfied. Like many other great men — Alexander for example — he yearned for other fields to conquer.

Thus into his mind flashed the idea of the cultivation, development, and ultimate perfection of the California poppy. In the California poppy, or escolchia, he foresaw possibilities for subdivision into numerous varieties equal to the success attained with the Phlox Drummondi of Texas. In the not distant future he promised himself the satisfaction of beholding the far-famed Tucker Escolchia decorating Fifth Avenue dining tables and lending a superb touch of color to bouquets handed across the footlights by way of tribute to prima donnas.

With the zeal kindled by this desirable end he hastened to California, and purchased a site for his trial seed farm in the well known Mesa de Flores horticultural district — in springtime a bewildering blaze of every shade of color as the various plants flourished into blossom.

But if Tucker's advent with his escolchia scheme was hailed

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with the reverse of enthusiasm by those already in the field, particularly the chrysanthemum interests — for to put the case in a nutshell he was just not wanted there — at least nature seemed to be one with him. Extremely encouraging was the report of the chemical experts, to whom he had sent samples of the soil with a request for information as to whether such was specially favorable for a high development of the escolchia plant. The experts doubted if a more promising soil could be found — a volcanic deposit reduced by ages of glacial and atmospheric treatment to the exact condition most likely to coincide with Mr. Tucker's effort. Both climatically and from the point of altitude professional opinion backed the escolchia to do wonders in that particular region under scientific cultivation.

So Tucker went ahead, had his soil prepared in long beds, and the seed carefully selected for the first trial crop. Followed then the usual period of waiting, and watching to foreguard against insectivorous and herbivorous enemies.

It was a species of the latter, which sprouted up with a vigor and widespread determination to hustle the first shoots of the escolchia out of existence, that caused Tucker astonishment and the before-mentioned indicated profane ejaculation. A thistle, with deep sucking roots and an entire stranger in those parts, looked defiantly up at him out of the soil, threatening utter ruin to his whole plan.

How it had become an undesirable immigrant there no one ventured a conjecture, though the chrysanthemum interests pointed out that as it was clear thistles thrived in escolchia soil, Tucker had better experiment in some other place where the climate or a local bug would kill off the noxious weed.

But Tucker was not so easily discouraged. He set his men to rout out the thistles, and sow another escolchia crop. Then he hurried back East to hire an expert horticulturist, to fight a possible recurrence of the thistle pest, also to inquire concerning the natural enemies of a plant with a reputation for flourishing in places where its absence is cordially desired.

It was while he was thus occupied that a telegram from the man he had left in charge of the seed farm made him decide quickly on the qualifications of a specialist assistant. The wire

he received, read: "Mustard sprouting all over the place."

Tucker made fast time back to Mesa de Flores, and introduced Lerch, the Eastern specialist, to the situation. Lerch inspected every inch of the ground, made exhaustive local inquiries, and was forced to admit he was considerably puzzled. Still nature performs some peculiarly unaccountable feats, and Lerch went to work to protect the third escolchia crop systematically.

He built a high wire screen, which also sank under the soil, around the seed farm, and watchers were put on duty to report any sign, human, bug, or herbal, which might point to another mysterious visitation. Lerch did not propose to risk any chances.

Again a period of waiting, with considerable confidence on the part of Lerch that he would at least raise escolchias and not thistles, mustard, or perchance dandelions.

It was one afternoon after a light rain had fallen that Tucker and Lerch were strolling around the seed farm.

"They ought to be sprouting up about this time," remarked Lerch, casting his eye over a neatly cultivated bed. "That rain should — "

He broke off suddenly, bent down, and plucked a tiny shoot of green from the soil. Then he started with an expression of amazement.

"Witch grass, by all that's infernal! Where the mischief could it have come from? And it's springing up everywhere," he added with a sweeping look of consternation.

Tucker rubbed his chin, giving voice to the opinion that witch grass seemed an appropriate growth. He rather thought the place was bewitched. But nothing in the way of light on the puzzle resulted from the rigid investigation which Lerch promptly started. Witch grass was not a local pest, and the watchers were positive no one had sown any in the seed farm. Neither did it seem possible that wind, bird, or insect could have been responsible.

Then how did the thistles, mustard, and witch grass take root there? Tucker and Lerch debated the problem from all its aspects, and were proceeding to argue without any prospect of solution long after night had fallen, when the rumble of an unusual approaching thunder storm in California broke upon their

ears. Both men paused to listen as if not quite sure but that their sense of hearing had been deceived. A nearer rumble brought them to their feet, and drew them out beyond the porch with wondering faces turned upward, surveying the darkened heavens.

"Thunder!" ejaculated Lerch. "That's queer out here."

"Something's falling," remarked Tucker, brushing his face with his hand. "Um — well — and it doesn't feel like rain."

"Same with me," agreed Lerch. "Wonder if it's cosmic dust blown up from a distant vol — Aye! — What? — Don't you hear a buzzing sound overhead?" he questioned.

A crash of thunder and a flash of lightning held back Tucker's response. But the lightning disclosed an object which caused both men to stare upward in complete wonder. It resembled a huge bat whirling in circles above the seed farm. Again darkness fell, but neither man spoke. Presently another flash revealed the strange object directly overhead, and a second later Tucker threw up his hands, clutching wildly at a shower of descending particles. He darted into the house, shouting for Lerch to follow.

"See here! See here!" he cried, displaying the particles in his open hands. "That's not cosmic dust from any old volcano. That's — "

"Witch grass seed," put in Lerch with strong emphasis.

"And that thing out there we caught sight of by the lightning flash was an aeroplane," added Tucker.

"An aeroplane scattering witch grass seed?" questioned Lerch.

"Sure, to put me and my escolchia scheme out of business," returned Tucker. "Now we have it, how the thistles and the mustard were sown. I believe it was the opposition chrysanthemum interests."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" ejaculated Lerch.

"That's just what I'll do to the aeroplane seedman if I ever catch him on earth," dryly remarked Tucker.

The Risible Rocker.*

BY ERSKINE M. HAMILTON.

"TALKIN' about strange things a happenin', did I ever tell ye about the rockin'-chair of my great-grandfather?" questioned Captain Barker, gazing meditatively at the dancing flames in the fireplace.

He had not; and we younger men who had gathered in the old Captain's house for a social chat, urged him to tell the story.

"Well, ye see it was this way: My great-grandfather — Peters was his name — was a sea captain, an' a pretty decent sort of chap at first, as I've heard tell. But he got into bad company, an' jest behaved scandalous, so that his wife left him, an' all his folks — that was 'way back in them old times — wouldn't have nothin' to do with him. He kept on gettin' worse till finally he turned his vessel into a pirate ship an' sailed the high seas as bold a buccaneer as most of 'em. Of course the English navy, an' all the other navies, got after him, but they didn't catch him, an' he might have died at sea of old age if he hadn't run up ag'in somethin' mighty strange.

"One day, as he was cruisin' along the Carolina coasts, he sighted an old tub of a ship that was a lumberin' along as though she was short-handed or didn't care whether she got anywhere. She didn't look very invitin', but havin' nothin' else to do Captain Peters ordered her to heave to an' boarded her. She had only three men for a crew, an' after tyin' 'em up he went down into the cabin to see what he could find. An old woman was a sittin' there, knittin' away as calm an' industrious as though she had to make stockin's for the whole seafarin' world.

"'Who be ye?' she said, countin' her stitches.

"'I'm Captain Peters, an' I've took this ship.'

"'Ye have. Where ye goin' to take it?'

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"'I ain't goin' to take it nowhere. I'm a pirate, an' I'm after what money ye've got.'

"'For the land's sake! So ye're a pirate!' she exclaimed, droppin' her knittin' an' lookin' at him through her spectacles like he'd been a freak at a dime museum. 'Well! well! I never seen a pirate before. I always s'posed they was big, handsome men, an' wore red caps, an' not thin, peaked little chaps like ye be. Sit down, Captain Peters, an' be sociable a bit, an' tell me how piratin' agrees with ye. It must be very tryin' on the nerves an' sort of depressin'-like.'

"While she was talkin' she pulled forward a rockin'-chair from a dark corner, an', lookin' at it, Captain Peters thought it was the curiousest chair he had ever seen. It was made of bamboo, or somethin' like that, an' in the back an' seat was woven pictures of snakes an' signs of the zodiac, an' all sorts of hieroglyphical figures. It was a mighty uncanny-lookin' chair, it sure was. Captain Peters looked at it, an' then at the old woman, hardly knowin' what to make of the outfit.

"'Sit down, Captain Peters, sit down,' continued the old woman with a wave at the chair. 'Piratin' must be dreadful harrowin' to a sensitive person like ye be — butcherin' people an' throwin' 'em overboard, as ye have to do sometimes — an' it's apt to make ye sad an' mournful like. Ye need cheerin' up, an', besides, I want to talk to ye, as I may never see another pirate while I'm in this world, an' I'm mighty sure there ain't any in heaven. I'm awful 'bliged to ye for comin'.'

"Well, Captain Peters was sort of flabbergasted by this kind of talk, an' fool-like he set down on the chair, not knowin' what else to do. An' then, all at once, he began to laugh. What he was a laughin' at he didn't know, but he kept on a laughin' all the same. He got so uproar'ous that some of his crew run down to see what the fun was about, but he could only wave his hand at 'em an' laugh an' they went on deck ag'in. Finally he got so weak an' red in the face that he could barely giggle, an' the old woman laid her hand on his arm.

"'There, now, Captain Peters, I never ag'in expect to see such a cheerful pirate as ye be this blessed minute — indeed,

I don't! It must be very amusin' to board an old woman's ship an' take it from her. No wonder ye laugh. Ye needn't try to get up, 'cause ye can't,' as the captain made an effort to rise from the chair. 'Now, listen to me. When my husband was in India he saved the life of an old Brahman priest, an' bein' grateful the priest gave him the chair ye're sittin' on. The old feller said it was ha'nted or had a spell on it, so if any one sit down on it he'd start to laughin' an' couldn't quit or get up till the owner said so. Last summer my husband died, an' I got the chair an' am now its owner. D'ye get all these facts, Captain Peters?'

"'I guess so, an' I'll make affidavy they're facts — every one of 'em!' answered the captain feebly, between giggles. 'What do ye want me to do? I'll do 'most anything to get out of this infernal chair.'

"'I reckon ye would, an' I'm goin' to give ye the chair as ye seem to enjoy sittin' on it so much. Ye ought to be grateful, Captain Peters, for havin' such a hilar'ous time. Now ye may quit laughin' a bit an' hear me. I'm goin' to call down some of yer crew, an' ye must tell 'em to take ye, chair an' all, an' put ye on yer own ship. Then ye must sail away, an' when ye're out of sight an' hearin', so ye can't find me ag'in, ye'll be the owner of the chair an' the spell will be lifted from ye. An', mind ye, *bein' the owner,* if ye want to give any other pirate a season of hilarity all ye've got to do is to get him to sit down on the chair. Will ye do as I say, or do ye want to stay here an' die of laughin'?'

"'My good woman,' said Captain Peters, solemnly, 'when I die I don't want any laughin' a goin' on, either on my part or from anybody that's a lookin' at me. I may be a pirate, but I was raised all right by good people, an' I don't think a feller ought to be a laughin' when he's a dyin'. It don't show a proper spirit.'

"'Sure not,' put in the old woman. 'It wouldn't be a bit proper.'

"'Then,' continued Captain Peters, 'I'll do jest as ye say, an' ye needn't fear that I'll bother ye any more. I'm glad ye've give me this chair, for it'll come mighty handy in lots of ways.

Every pirate ship ought to have one, an' I'm jest grateful for the gift. When I get back to my own ship I'll send ye a bag of English gold to pay for it.'

"Well, sir, it was really techin' how friendly them two got to be as they kept on a talkin' together, like old acquaintances, as ye may say, an' when Captain Peters sailed away he made his crew dip the skull an' cross-bones flag, an' the old woman stood on the poop of her vessel an' waved her apron back at 'em. It was a beautiful an' techin' sight — it sure was!

"Howsomever, Captain Peters was glad to get away, for he was nigh on to used up from laughin' too much. He had the chair taken to his cabin an' bein' possessor an' owner he was mightily tickled in thinkin' of what he would do with it. After leavin' the old woman he pulled down his pirate flag, an' started south with the idea of cruisin' round the West Indies for a time. All the while he was jest itchin' for a chance to use that chair on somebody. He had an enemy — a rival pirate captain, who was tryin' to form a trust an' gobble up all the buccaneerin' business by underhand work — an' he was in hopes of meetin' him. But he didn't; he met somebody he didn't want to meet. He was sailin' slowly along one day, for there wasn't much of a breeze at the time, when his lookout sighted several English war ships comin' toward 'em. The fleet was commanded by an admiral. Generally speakin' Captain Peters could outsail any ship in the English navy, or any other navy, an' if it had been only one vessel he'd have made a fight for it, but this time luck was ag'in him. In spite of all he could do they overhauled him an' he had to heave to. The admiral, himself, with two or three officers, all dressed in gold lace an' other trimmin's, stepped on board.

"'Is this Captain Peters, the pirate?' demanded the admiral, cockin' his eye up an' around to see what the ship looked like.

"'My name ain't Peters, it's Simpkins. This ship is jest a tradin' vessel, owned by some of the most religious folks in Boston, an' they sent me out with a cargo of baked beans,' answered Captain Peters, feelin' desperate, an' not knowin' what else to say.

"'A cargo of — baked beans?' questioned the astonished admiral.

"'Sure! I've got a lot of other stuff, of course, but the baked beans go to the planters in Virginia. Come below, Admiral, an' I'll show ye.'

"Captain Peters was gettin' his wits back ag'in, for he saw a way out of his predicament. The admiral was suspicious. However, he finally consented to go below, and ordered his officers to keep a close watch on the ship while he was gone. Captain Peters first led the way to his cabin, an' placin' a bottle of wine an' two glasses on the table he pulled forward the rockin'-chair.

"'Sit down, Admiral, an' have a glass with me, then I'll show ye the cargo.'

"'That's a very extr'ordinary-lookin' chair — very!' said the admiral. 'Where did ye get it?'

"'It was give to me by an old woman whose ship I saved from the pirates,' an' Captain Peters chuckled inwardly, for this was the first truth he had told so far.

"Without further words the admiral filled his glass, drank it, an' then plumped himself down on the chair. Of course the same thing happened to him that happened to Captain Peters. He began to laugh, an' kept on a laughin'. It was so funny that Captain Peters laughed too. The admiral tried to get up, but he couldn't, an' he haw-hawed till he about bu'sted the buttons an' gilt braid off his coat.

"'Let me up, ye scoundrel,' he managed to say. 'I'll have ye hanged for this.'

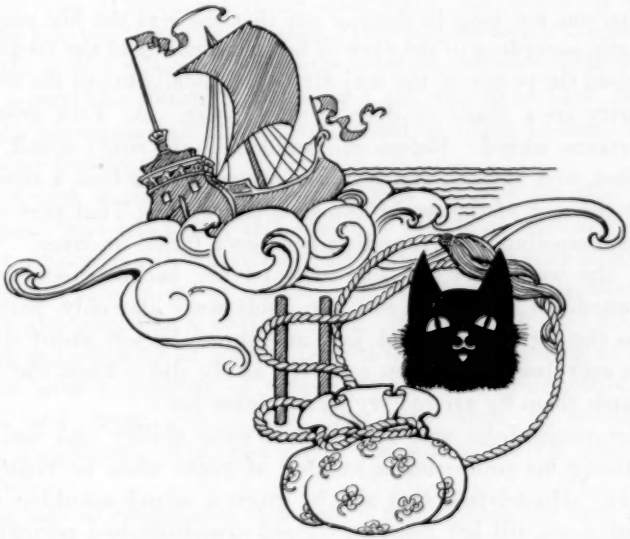
"'There ain't goin' to be any hangin' or dyin' on this ship, Admiral,' answered Captain Peters cheerfully. 'Of course if ye insist on havin' a funeral by dyin' of laughin', ye can do so, but I don't b'lieve ye will. Now I'm goin' to do by ye as the old woman did by me — I'm goin' to give ye the chair. Ye must tell yer men to take ye — jest as ye are — back to the fleet, an' ye must sail away an' leave me alone. Bein' as ye can't help yerself, Admiral, will ye promise?'

"Well, the admiral promised — what else could he do? — an' the fleet sailed away. But Captain Peters had a bad scare all the same — so bad that he concluded to quit the piratin' busi-

ness for good. Callin' his crew together he told 'em so, an' takin' his share of the swag he was put ashore. He went back to Connecticut, made up with his wife an' family, an' lived peaceable till he died."

"What became of the chair?" some one of us asked.

"Oh — I don't jest exactly know," replied the old captain slowly. "Seems to me I did hear that the admiral kept it in his family for a good many years, an' finally it was put into the British museum."



The Parable of Etta Whose Parents Thought Her a Remarkable Child.*

BY C. M. HOFFMAN-SCHERER.

TTA was the first child of her silly parents. They had seemed to be normal persons before the arrival of that first baby. Then they underwent a transformation similar to what happens when persons go crazy. The baby was not only their first child, it was the only child worth talking about. All other children lacked some wonderful quality that theirs was supposed to have. When Etta squalled, all other things had to come to a standstill till the little darling consented to let the world move on again.

Etta was not long in finding out that she was the big majority on earth, according to the view of her parents. And she frequently exercised the power of the majority tyrannically to put the scorned minority in a shade so deep it was forgot. As Etta grew her importance waxed. Before she could talk, she could squall. She squalled, and bawled, and bellowed whenever she took a notion to make the rest of the world dance to her wails. That part of the world immediately surrounding her never failed to dance. "Waa-a," she would cry, as she stiffened her backbone and curled backward till her head and her heels were the only parts not up in the air. She would jerk and throw herself about till she made everybody else jump as lively as she did. Then she'd stop to watch them fly around trying to please her.

Her uncle John was a doctor of some ability and had been practicing his profession a number of years when he visited the family. He advised that she be given a sound spanking in repeated doses, till her most prominent symptoms had permanently disappeared. His sister, Etta's mother, was terribly shocked.

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For the first time in her life she discovered her brother John was a heartless wretch. She was so worried about it that she related it all to several of her neighbors. When they agreed with John's advice she fell to explaining that Etta was different from other children and had to be judged by another standard.

Other mothers thanked heaven that their children were different from Etta, and they began to shun the places Etta was expected. They had been told so often what a remarkable child she was that they did not want to hear it any more; and they felt that, since Etta's mother thought her darling's ways were so cute and extraordinary, it would not do for them to compete with her mother in that matter.

Etta kept getting more remarkable, in the eyes of her parents. When she started to school, her teacher was the most popular one in the primary grades. But Etta promptly discovered that her teacher was a mean old thing who would not dance to Etta's whims, like her father and mother. Her parents began to complain that the public school is run on the level of common children and that remarkable children do not get the attention they should. All the acquaintances of the family had to listen to that, and a lot more similar talk.

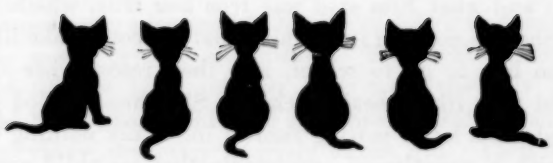
Etta took a notion now and then that she was too sick to go to school; and what Etta said was true *was* true, whether it was or not. She was not long in learning that she could fake illness till it was too late to go to school, and then recover her shattered health and play like a healthy child. She thus avoided going to school and got a lot of petting thrown in, to say nothing of being stuffed with a quantity of sweetmeats that no child could have eaten and kept well. But Etta was such a remarkable child, you know. Yes, you know, she was not a bit like other children.

She was so remarkable that before many years she had ceased to live with her father and mother, and they were living with her, and for her. Please her they could not. She was so remarkable that she had to point out their shortcomings frequently and in language as remarkable as she herself. Then, finally, just to spite them, and to show that she had a mind of her own, she married

a worthless dog for them to support; and continued to do remarkable things.

MORAL: If you notice anything remarkable in your child, try to forget it.

ON THE Q. T.: There were children before yours and there will be many, many after yours; and the mere fact that you are your child's parent is no great distinction for it.

LAGNIAPPE: What our neighbors boast of in their children would make us blush if ours had the same traits, till ours get them.

NOTE. — The Parable of Millard Who Loved Blessed Farm Life at a Distance will appear in the September issue of THE BLACK CAT.